

Message Text

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SUBJECT: STATE DEPARTMENT NOON BRIEFING, TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 1976.

FOLLOWING IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT NOON BRIEFING MARCH 2:

Q: BOB, THIS WEEKEND, GOVERNOR REAGAN, SPEAKING IN FLORIDA, ACCUSED THE UNITED STATES OF ENTERING INTO A SECRET AGREEMENT WITH PANAMA OVER THE CANAL, AND SAID THAT IN DOING THIS, THE DEPARTMENT HAD DECEIVED THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND FAILED TO KEEP THE PRESIDENT INFORMED. HAS ANY AGREEMENT BEEN REACHED?

A: NO. THOSE CHARGES ARE FALSE, COMPLETELY FALSE. IT IS JUST NOT TRUE THAT THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA HAVE ARRIVED AT A SECRET AGREEMENT. YOU WILL RECALL THAT WE ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON THE NEGOTIATIONS THERE. THEY HAVE BEEN ON THE RECORD, I THINK, FOR TWO YEARS. THE NEGOTIATORS ARE STILL IN PROCESS OF

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NEGOTIATING AN AGREEMENT. I BELIEVE AMBASSADOR BUNKER

RETURNED FROM PANAMA LAST WEEK. IT IS NOT MY UNDERSTANDING THAT A FINAL AGREEMENT IS IMMINENT. AND, REALLY, I THINK WE OUGHT TO RECALL THAT NEGOTIATIONS TO MODERNIZE OUR

RELATIONSHIP WITH PANAMA HAVE BEEN GOING ON FOR A LONG TIME, UNDER AT LEAST THREE PRESIDENTS. AS FAR AS THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION IS CONCERNED, ALL INSTRUCTIONS TO THE NEGOTIATING TEAM -- WHICH IS AN INTER-DEPARTMENTAL TEAM WITH STATE, DOD, AND JCS REPRESENTATIVES -- ALL OF THESE INSTRUCTIONS ARE APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT, WHO HAS MAINTAINED STRICT CONTROL OVER THE WHOLE PROCESS. WE HAVE MADE CLEAR, THE PRESIDENT HAS MADE CLEAR, THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAS MADE CLEAR, THAT OBVIOUSLY ANY TREATY WHICH -- ANY DRAFT TREATY THAT MAY EVENTUALLY EMERGE FROM THESE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE -- THAT IT WILL SAFEGUARD OUR VITAL AMERICAN INTERESTS IN THE CANAL. MOREOVER, WE HAVE KEPT THE CONGRESS FULLY INFORMED ON EVERY STEP OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. INGERSOLL

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